EXPLORING THE ENACTMENT OF A COACHING STANCE: A CASE OF DISSONANCE FROM ONE COACH-TEACHER DYAD

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Drawing on data collected from one coaching cycle during mathematics instruction for one coach-teacher dyad, this study explores one instructional coach's discursive enactment of their coaching stance. Qualitative analyses indicate that there was dissonance between the coach's stance for coaching and their discursive enactment of coaching, and that the coach's disciplinary expertise seemed to influence the enactment of her coaching stance. Implications for research and practice are discussed.

Keywords: instructional leadership, classroom discourse, professional development

Coaching is complex as coaches must navigate multiple, and often competing, tensions in their roles and responsibilities as they support teachers. In the context of a three-part coaching cycle (Bengo, 2016), a coach has simultaneous obligations, including: working with a teacher to design, prepare for, and implement a high-quality lesson; supporting the teacher to learn content and pedagogy; establishing a trusting and productive relationship with the teacher; and developing a teacher's capacity to plan for and reflect upon lessons without the presence of a coach. This complexity is further amplified as a coach must balance the roles of an expert (in content, pedagogy, or both) and collegial thinking partner. Coaches typically operate from a position of authority, given their formal title and comparative experience to the teachers they support (Mosley Wetzel et al., 2017). From this position of power, coaches can choose to leverage their expertise as they work towards the aforementioned obligations. However, the conception of coaching (e.g., Showers & Joyce, 1996) and more current definitions of coaching (e.g., Baker et al., 2021) call for a coach to act as a non-evaluative colleague available for job-embedded collaboration. Thus, coaches are tasked with making continual choices during coaching interactions regarding how to balance these competing roles and responsibilities, making a coach's capacity to creatively manage these tensions a central feature of intentional coaching (West & Cameron, 2013).

Within mathematics education, there is a dearth of literature on how coaches enact their stance, defined here as a coach's behaviors when managing the competing roles of expert and colleague (e.g., Deussen et al., 2007; Ippolito, 2010), in ways that best support teacher learning. Furthermore, little is known about the specific discursive practices coaches use when enacting different stances during interactions with teachers. Our study seeks to fill this gap through understanding how one instructional coach discursively enacts their coaching stance throughout planning, teaching, and debriefing interactions in a coaching cycle with one elementary teacher during mathematics instruction. Specifically, three research questions are explored: (1) What is one coach's stance about their coaching practice, (2) How does the coach discursively enact their coaching stance, and (2) How might the coach's disciplinary expertise influence the enactment of their coaching stance?

Related Literature
We frame our study with the argument that coaching interactions are situated in a system of

negotiation in which the language choices and roles of interlocutors continuously shape and are shaped by the context of the interaction (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). This system of negotiation involves one speaker assuming a role of a primary "knower" relegating the other participant to a role of secondary "knower" during a linguistic exchange (González & DeJarnette, 2012). Researchers studying literacy coaching have provided language describing the two competing stances for how coaches leverage their role and potential position of power when talking with teachers: *reflective* or *directive* (Deussen et al., 2007; Ippolito, 2010; Sailors & Price, 2015). Coaches using a *reflective* stance use discourse moves to position the teacher as the primary "knower" when examining the effectiveness of their practice and student outcomes (Ippolito, 2010). Discourse moves associated with a reflective coaching stance include invitational moves (e.g., questions) and paraphrases as these forms of discourse invite teacher cognition and do not involve the coach sharing their own thinking or opinions (Costa & Garmston, 2016; Deussen et al., 2007). In contrast, a *directive* stance involves the coach using language to position themselves as the "primary knower". Discourse moves associated with a directive stance include suggestions, explanations, and evaluative feedback which all involve the coach sharing ideas generated from their opinions and beliefs (Ippolito, 2010). We also reference facilitation literature within mathematics education (e.g., van Es et al., 2014) to argue the existence of a third coaching stance: *facilitative.* Coaches enacting a facilitative stance use language to guide the direction, focus, and clarity of the conversation without positioning either the coach or teacher as the "primary knower". Discourse moves associated with a facilitative stance include sharing low-inference, non-evaluative observations, clarifying ideas being discussed to ensure a shared understanding, and framing conversations by reminding the teacher about goals or larger purposes established during prior discussion.

Researchers, in both literacy and mathematics education, have examined the discursive tendencies of coaches. Heineke (2013) noted that in one particular context, literacy coaches "dominated the discourse" through the use of many suggestions (p. 424). In these cases, teacher participation and learning opportunities in the conversations were limited. In a study directly exploring how literacy coaches balance differing stances, Ippolito (2010) found that effective coaches shifted between reflective, and directive moves within a single coaching session. Similarly, when studying three mathematics coaches, Gillespie and colleagues (2019) found all three mathematics coaches frequently shifted between using reflective and directive moves during planning and debriefing conversations with teachers. However, despite working in a similar context, the coaches had contrasting tendencies with respect to the duration, intensity, and frequency in their use of directive moves. Furthermore, these tendencies remained stable across multiple interactions with the same teacher. Witherspoon et al. (2021) found that nearly all coaches held directive stances during planning conversations but, in more effective coaching sessions, coaches "remained engaged in longer discussions about each pedagogical decision before telling the teacher their own interpretation" (p. 892). In other words, effective coaches balanced different coaching stances by holding reflective and facilitative stances prior to shifting into a directive stance. In sum, these studies highlight that both reflective and directive moves are common forms of discourse within coaching interactions, yet coaches differ in how they employ such moves to support their teachers.

To our knowledge, only one research study has examined how coaches enact a set of beliefs comprising a theory of action for effectively supporting teacher learning. Russell et al. (2020) examined how coaches deviated from the inquiry-based principles of a coaching model by providing teachers with explicit directions or suggestions. Russell et al. claimed some project

coaches frequently used directive coaching moves with teachers, despite the model's theory that reflective coaching moves that support teacher inquiry most effectively support improvements to teaching. However, Russell et al. deemed that directive coaching moves, even in contradiction of the beliefs underpinning the coaching model, were efficacious in supporting teacher development under appropriate conditions. These studies point to the importance of understanding coaches' beliefs about balancing competing stances when supporting teachers and how coaches make decisions about shifting between stances.

Methods

Setting and Participants

This study was situated in Midtown District, which enrolled about 10,000 students in 18 schools. We partnered with one full-time, school-based elementary instructional coach (Jade) and one fourth grade teacher (Jennifer). Both individuals were white females. At the time of the study, Coach Jade has been an educator for 12 years across grades K-5. She had worked in her current school district as an instructional coach for four years. Teacher Jennifer was entering her third year as a fourth-grade elementary teacher in Midtown. Coach Jade and Teacher Jennifer appeared to have a positive professional relationship that was marked by co-respect and trust.

The data for this study come from a larger study exploring teachers' learning opportunities during one-on-one coaching (Saclarides, 2022; Saclarides & Lubienski, 2021; Saclarides & Munson, 2021). Coach Jade was specifically selected as the focal coach for the current analysis given that she explicitly discussed her desire to develop and sustain a reflective coaching stance when engaged with teachers as her own personal coaching goal. Hence, we perceived that Coach Jade's coaching cycle with Teacher Jennifer could enable us to better understand our broad research focus, which is how coaches enact their coaching stance when engaged with teachers as well as the mediating factors that may influence that stance.

Data Source and Analytic Technique

Data sources encompassed observations and field notes of Coach Jade's and Teacher Jennifer's coaching cycle, which included two planning meetings (range of 21-46 minutes), one modeled lesson (75 minutes), and one reflection meeting (5 minutes). Furthermore, five semi-structured interviews (Lareau, 2021) were conducted separately with Coach Jade and Teacher Jennifer to establish context for the analysis (range of 10-44 minutes). All observations and interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

We first read through all interview transcripts to better understand Coach Jade's coaching stance (RQ1). We used the literature-driven codes for reflective and directive stances (e.g., Ippolito, 2010), and facilitative stance (e.g., van Es et al., 2014) when coding for coaching stance during this phase. Next, we explored Coach Jade's discursive enactment of her coaching stance (RQ2). To do this, we organized the planning, modeling, and reflection transcripts for analysis. First, we created excel files where each alternating vertical cell contained either the coach's or teacher's talk turn. Next, we focused our attention on only the cells containing the coach's talk turn given our interest in exploring the coach's discursive enactment of her coaching stance. We further parsed each coaching talk turn at the sentence-level, which was our unit of analysis. Next, the second author used a comprehensive coding scheme developed through prior work (Gillespie et al., 2019), and informed by literature (Ippolito, 2010; van Es et al., 2014), to code at the sentence-level for the coach's discursive stance. One of the following three broad codes was applied: Directive, Reflective, Facilitative. Last, to better understand how the coach's disciplinary expertise influenced the enactment of her coaching stance (RQ3), we engaged in one

last coding round. The first author coded for the substance of each coach-spoken sentence using one of the following codes: pedagogy, content, logistics, other. All codes and code definitions can be found in Table 1 below. Last, matrices were created, and counts were completed to better understand the prevalence and intersection of the applied codes.

Table 1: Codes, Definitions, and Examples

Codes		Definition	Example
Stance	Directive	Coach moves in which the coach shares their thinking and opinions with the teacher.	*Coach Jade*: That's something we can work on, that's something they can work on independently, but I think we have to put that in place for kids we know don't have single digit multiplication in place.
	Facilitative	Moves in which the coach establishing the focus, direction, and/or clarity of the conversation	*Coach Jade*: I heard you today having them repeat directions.
	Reflective	Coach moves in which the coach invites the teacher to share their thinking and opinions**.**	*Coach Jade*: So what did you think of yesterday? What did you take away from that?
Substance	Content	The coach's interaction is focused on the mathematics content, including unpacking student mathematics learning goals and mathematics standards, as well as the district-provided mathematics curriculum, including seeking to understand precisely what the curriculum requires of students.	*Coach Jade:* Just so I know what we're talking about. Like, 2 times 2, and 4 times 4. [Are those] like square arrays?
	Logistics	The coach's interaction is focused on logistics, including discussing the timing for the lesson, lesson materials, and classroom management.	*Coach Jade*: I looked at your schedule. Is this pretty accurate as far as, 12:45-2 [for mathematics instruction] across the day?
	Pedagogy	The coach's interaction is focused on pedagogy, which encompassed conversations about student discourse, differentiating instruction, monitoring student learning, using data to inform next instructional steps, and planning and/or creating original activities that extend beyond the district-provided curriculum.	*Coach Jade:* So, maybe for those lower ones, it's talking about, it's three plus three plus three. Or three, three times. 'Cuz I'm guessing if we gave them three times…I'd be curious even three times three to see how they said they solved it.

Findings

Coach Jade's Coaching Stance

Overall, Coach Jade articulated a goal of enacting a reflective coaching stance when engaged with teachers. Instead of using a directive approach that would position her as an authority or

primary knower, Coach Jade sought to position her teachers as primary knowers as she centered their ideas, goals, and questions. Coach Jade shared, "I ask them what they want. I ask them what they want to grow in." As previously mentioned, this was even Coach Jade's personal goal for her coaching cycle with Teacher Jennifer: to grow in her ability to enact a reflective coaching stance. Coach Jade shared, "I think that every coaching opportunity provides me with the opportunity to listen and try to not tell as much. I should do more questioning instead of telling. That will be my coaching focus [with Teacher Jennifer]".

Coach Jade's Discursive Enactment of her Coaching Stance

When coding Coach Jade's spoken sentences for her discursive coaching stance, the most common code applied was *directive* (137/288) as she engaged with Teacher Jennifer during their coaching cycle (see Table 2). Although it was Coach Jade's personal coaching goal to focus on enacting a reflective stance with Teacher Jennifer, we applied the reflective code to Jade's spoken sentences the least frequently (40/288) (See Table 2).

Table 2: Discursive Enactment of Coaching Stance

	Planning Meeting 1	Planning Meeting 2	Modeled Lesson	Reflection Meeting	Total
Directive	28	88	10	11	137
Facilitative	56	50	4	1	111
Reflective	13	21	0	6	40

The following excerpt illustrates what it sounded like as Coach Jade enacted the most prevalent coaching stance - that of being directive - with Teacher Jennifer. During planning meeting one, when discussing how students' prior experiences with ten-frames might support students during the lesson, coach Jade shared the following (numbers added for explanatory purpose here and below):

> (1) I moved that dot over here to a ten and there's one left over, so I know that's ten, one, eleven. (2) So that really helps them. (3) Kindergarten has done phenomenally with that, so that might be a place we play with for some of that.

In this talk-turn, coach Jade spoke three sentences, each coded as directive because each sentence involved her sharing her thoughts or opinions with Jennifer, temporarily positioning herself as the primary knower within this moment. Jade begins by explaining how she used the ten-frame to conceptualize the number 11 (sentence 1). Next, Jade shares her opinion that ten-frames help students (sentence 2). Last, Jade suggests they consider incorporating the ten-frames as they collaboratively plan their lesson (sentence 3).

To illustrate discursive moves in which Coach Jade shifted between a facilitative and reflective stance, we provide the following example also from planning meeting one. In this moment, Jade and Jennifer are examining a single question within the lesson they are planning as it is printed in the curriculum resource. Coach Jade says: "(1) It just says prime and composite numbers. (2) What does that look like?" In this conversational moment, Jade tells Jennifer that the question, as printed in the curriculum resource, involves prime and composite numbers (sentence 1). Because Jade is highlighting the language contained in the printed question without sharing her own interpretation or thinking, we coded this sentence as facilitative. Coach Jade then asks Jennifer to share her thinking about what student thinking might look like as they attempt to answer the question (sentence 2). In doing so, Jade initiates an opportunity for

Jennifer to share her thinking about how students would approach this question. Thus, we coded this sentence as reflective.

The Influence of Disciplinary Expertise on Coaching Stance

As previously discussed, we were interested in better understanding the mediating influence of Coach Jade's disciplinary expertise on the enactment of her coaching stance. Although Coach Jade was an instructional coach and was expected to coach across all content areas, she did not feel as confident coaching teachers in mathematics as opposed to English Language Arts. In her interview, Coach Jade stated, "I think that I'm definitely stronger for [coaching] literacy [as compared to mathematics]". However, Coach Jade was eager to deepen her own mathematics content knowledge in the context of her coaching cycle with Teacher Jennifer. She shared, "I'm going to try my best for math! It will really push me".

We highlight several noteworthy trends in the relationship between the substance and stance of Coach Jade's discourse to understand how disciplinary expertise may mediate the enactment of Jade's coaching stance (see Table 3). First, when Coach Jade enacted a directive stance, positioning herself as a primary knower, most of the time (85/137) it was about pedagogy. In contrast, there were fewer instances in which she discussed content (31/137) when enacting a directive stance. Second, there was more of an even split between pedagogy (16/40) and content (14/40) when enacting a reflective stance, where she positioned the teacher as the primary knower.

Table 3: Influence of Disciplinary Expertise on Coaching Stance

	Pedagogy	Content	Logistics	Other	Overall
Directive	85	31	18	3	137
Facilitative	19	36	56	0	111
Reflective	16	14	10	0	40

The following excerpt illustrates what it sounded like as Coach Jade enacted a directive stance about pedagogy - the most commonly noted trend in Table 3 above. During the reflection conversation, Teacher Jennifer shared her observations of Coach Jade's use of wait time, to which Coach Jade responded:

> (1) Yeah, I wasn't consciously thinking about wait time. (2) Maybe I just, I don't know. (3) I knew when I came in, I wanted them to do more talking than me. (4) And part of that's from our district-sponsored literacy professional development. (5) Which is crazy because it's a literacy based training.

This conversational moment was coded as directive because Coach Jade momentarily positioned herself as a primary knower as she shared her thinking about the pedagogical move of giving students wait time to spur student discourse. Although Coach Jade acknowledges that she was not intentionally thinking about wait time while she modeled instruction (sentences 1-2), she implemented this particular structure as a way to create a rich discursive environment for students in which students talked more than the teacher (sentence 3). Coach Jade ends by referencing the literacy-based training sponsored by the district office (sentences 4-5), which presumably is where she learned about this connection between wait time and enhanced student discourse.

As a second example, the following excerpt illustrates Coach Jade enacting a reflective stance about mathematics content during the second planning meeting. At the beginning of their

meeting, Coach Jade initiates the following interaction with Teacher Jennifer to clarify the mathematical content embedded in the district-provided curriculum, "(1) Just so I know what (content) we're talking about. (2) Like, 2 times 2? (3) 4 times 4? (4) (Is that) like square arrays?" In this discursive moment, Coach Jade enacted a reflective coaching stance as she momentarily positioned Teacher Jennifer as the primary knower about 4th grade mathematics content. Specifically, Coach Jade wanted to ensure that she understood what the mathematics term "square array" means (sentence 1). She proceeded to provide two examples of what she perceived a square array was (sentences 2-3) and ended by asking Teacher Jennifer if this was correct (sentence 4).

Discussion and Implications

All coaches have a preference for the coaching stance they seek to enact when working with teachers. This coaching stance may be informed by beliefs about what it means to be an effective coach, as well as coaches' perceptions about the needs of individual teachers. However, when managing simultaneous obligations and balancing roles of expert and colleague based on the needs of individual teachers, our findings suggest it may be difficult for coaches to enact their preferred stance for coaching. Like prior studies on literacy and mathematics coaches (e.g., Gillespie et al., 2019; Heinke, 2013; Ippolito, 2010; Witherspoon et al., 2021) we agree that coaching inherently involves coaches using, and productively balancing, differing stances and discourse moves. We highlight the challenge and complexity of enacting a set of coaching beliefs to extend this prior research and make visible potential assumptions about coaching.

In our study, we found dissonance between Coach Jade's stance for coaching and the discursive enactment of her stance. Although Coach Jade desired to enact a reflective coaching stance with Teacher Jennifer and explicitly set a coaching goal to enact this belief, in practice Coach Jade primarily used directive coaching moves (137/288). In other words, although Coach Jade had the goal of primarily positioning Teacher Jennifer as the primary knower, just the opposite happened in the context of their coaching cycle: most of the time Coach Jade positioned herself as the primary knower. We consider this case of dissonance connected to the findings from Russell et al. (2020). Recall that Russell et al. found that coaches operating in an inquiry-based model coaching made responsive adaptations by using directive coach moves. In this context, the dissonance existed between the beliefs inscribed in an established coaching model and the discursive actions of coaches learning to use the model. Our findings highlight a similar case of dissonance but between a coaches' own articulation of her stance for coaching and her discursive actions, further highlighting the challenge of efficaciously enacting a stance for coaching.

The literature points to various factors that can influence a coach's ability to enact their coaching stance, including relational and organizational contexts (Russell et al., 2020) as well as the alignment between the goals, instructional vision, and evaluation mechanisms of an administrator, coach and teacher (Ippolito, 2010). In this study, we highlight one such factor, disciplinary expertise, that appeared to mediate Coach Jade's enactment of her discursive coaching stance. That is, when Coach Jade enacted a directive stance and positioned herself as the primary knower, most of the time it was about pedagogy (85/137) instead of content (31/127). This can be understood in light of the fact that Coach Jade reportedly felt less confident about mathematics content, so it is conceivable she would be more likely to leverage her expertise and use directive moves when discussing pedagogy. Surprisingly, when Coach Jade enacted a reflective stance and positioned Teacher Jennifer as the primary knower, there was a

near even split between content (14/40) and pedagogy (16/40). Given Coach Jade's self-reported lack of confidence with 4th grade mathematics content, we hypothesized that there would be many more instances in which Coach Jade enacted a reflective stance about mathematics content than was noted in the data.

This study has implications for both research and practice. We raise methodological questions for the research community regarding difficulties with adequately characterizing or "measuring" coaches' discursive enactment of their coaching stance. For one, we acknowledge that we are seeking to understand a complex phenomenon – the enactment of a coach's stance for coaching – by assigning codes at the sentence-level and then aggregating counts into broad categories. We posit studying a coach's discursive enactment of their stance for coaching is more nuanced and complex, and we do not mean to oversimplify this complexity with our analysis. However, given that the research community has not yet developed tools to adequately capture and study our phenomenon of interest, we invite other researchers to continue to grapple with us about this important dilemma. Relatedly, we raise methodological questions associated with talking about prevalence of codes when there may be a natural imbalance with the codes themselves. That is, when coaches enact a directive stance with teachers and are positioning themselves as the primary knower in an effort to explain or suggest something, it may take more sentences to offer clear and direct assistance in that discursive moment. Conversely, when coaches enact a reflective stance with teachers and pose a question, it takes many fewer sentences to enact that stance in that discursive moment. For example, a single question from a coach may create lengthy verbal contributions from the teacher. Hence, we wonder how future research on coaching can better attend to and examine such discursive moves that may carry a natural imbalance of counts. Last, we call upon future research to invite coaches to reflect on their own discursive enactment of their coaching stance by, for example, member checking. This would help elevate coaches' voices in the research process and importantly tap into their insider's, or emic, perspective about the discursive enactment of their coaching stance.

For school districts with coaching programs, district- and school-level administrators must clearly articulate their vision regarding the coaching stance that they expect their coaches to enact when engaged with teachers. What is important here is that there is a shared understanding among district- and school-level administrators and coaches about the particular coaching stance that is to be enacted in that particular school district. Once this is established, it should not be assumed that coaches instinctively understand how to enact a particular coaching stance or set of stances. Rather, coaches should be provided with ongoing, job-embedded professional development that helps them understand the coaching stance they should enact, as well as the accompanying discursive moves that will enable coaches to enact their coaching stance. Furthermore, and in the context of professional development, coaches must be supported to reflect about the variety of mediating factors that may influence the enactment of their coaching stance, and think about how they can still enact their preferred coaching stance amid such mediating factors.

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